

FINDINGS: Systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom continue in Saudi Arabia. Almost 10 years since the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States, the Saudi government has failed to implement a number of promised reforms, including those related to religious practice and tolerance. Despite King Abdullah undertaking some limited reform measures and promoting inter-religious dialogue in international fora in recent years, the Saudi government persists in banning all forms of public religious expression other than that of the government's own interpretation of one school of Sunni Islam and also interferes with private religious practice. Ismaili Muslims continue to suffer severe discrimination and abuse on account of their religious identity and there is an ongoing crackdown on Shi'a Muslim dissidents, which has resulted in numerous arrests and detentions. Members of the Commission to Promote Virtue and Prevent Vice (CPVPV or religious police) continue to commit abuses, overstep their authority with impunity, and are not subject to judicial oversight. Moreover, the government continues to be involved in supporting activities globally that promote an extremist ideology, and in some cases, violence toward non-Muslims and disfavored Muslims.

USCIRF again recommends in 2010 that Saudi Arabia be designated as a "country of particular concern," or CPC. Although so designated by the State Department since 2004, an indefinite waiver on taking any action in consequence of the CPC designation has been in place since 2006.

Little discernible progress has been made nearly four years after the State Department publicly announced that, as a result of bilateral discussions, the Saudi government had confirmed that it would advance specific policies with the aim of improving religious freedom conditions. The Saudi government continues to engage in an array of severe violations of human rights as part of its repression of freedom of religion or belief. Abuses include: torture and cruel and degrading treatment or punishment imposed by judicial, security, and administrative authorities; prolonged detention without charges and often incommunicado; and blatant denials of the right to liberty and security of the person, including through coercive measures aimed at women and the broad jurisdiction and abusive actions of the CPVPV. The full implementation by the Saudi government of the July 2006 policies would diminish some of its institutionalized abusive practices that have resulted in severe violations of freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief in Saudi Arabia and worldwide.

PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS: USCIRF has concluded that U.S. policy in Saudi Arabia does not adequately prioritize issues of human rights, including freedom of religion or belief. The CPC designation and subsequent U.S.-Saudi bilateral discussions have not resulted in substantial reforms by the Saudi government concerning religious freedom. Therefore, the U.S. government should lift the indefinite waiver of action, or at a minimum extend a limited 180 day waiver, during which time the Saudi government should complete reforms on textbooks and rein in the CPVPV. In addition, Congress should fund USCIRF to conduct a study and report on progress by the Saudi government in implementing the religious freedom reforms announced by the State Department in July 2006 following bilateral discussions between the two countries. Additional recommendations for U.S. policy towards Saudi Arabia can be found in the 2010 Annual Report chapter on Saudi Arabia and by following this link:
<http://www.uscirt.gov/images/ar2010/saudiarabia2010.pdf>